

Orote Airfield
Apra Harbor Naval Reservation
Orote Point
Guam

HAER No. GU-1

HAER
GU,
1-OROPT,
1-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record
National Park Service
Western Region
Department of the Interior
San Francisco, CA 94102

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

HAER
GU,
1-DROPT
1-

Orote Airfield

HAER No. GU-1

Location: Apra Harbor Naval Reservation, Orote Point, Guam

UTM:	Point	Zone	Easting	Northing
	A	55	245320	1486990
	B	55	244620	1485300
	C	55	243360	1486760
	D	55	243440	1486990

Quad: Apra Harbor

Date of Construction: 1921-1922

Present Owner: Commanding Officer
U. S. Naval Station
F.P.O. San Francisco 96630

Present Use: Construction Baseyard

Significance: Orote Airfield was the first airfield on Guam, a pioneering effort in military aviation in the western Pacific. It played an important role in the Battle of the Philippine Sea in 1944 and was important in the liberation of Guam.

Researcher: Robert J. Hommon, Ph.D.
Archaeologist
Pacific Division
Naval Facilities Engineering Command
Pearl Harbor, Hawaii 96890

October 1986

Retyped, Edited
and Transmitted by: Jean P. Yearby, HAER, 1988

The runway, buildings and facilities of the U. S. Marine Air Station on Orote Point, Guam, were built during 1921 and 1922. "The first Marine aviators ever to serve west of San Francisco were ten pilots and ninety enlisted men of Flight L, 4th Squadron, who arrived [at the air station] in Guam on March 17, 1921" (Carano and Sanchez 1964: 230). The construction crews included both Marines and Guamanians until the end of 1921, after which the Marines finished the work unaided, because of lack of funds to pay the Guamanians.

In 1926, personnel of the air station were placed under the command of the commanding officer, marine barracks. Thus, they lost the independent status which they had enjoyed during their arrival on the island. During the same year, a new administration building was constructed. It housed the squadron offices, sick bay, dental office, aerological office and guardhouse, all under one roof. Built by the Marines themselves, it added greatly to the comfort and efficiency of the command (Carano and Sanchez 1964: 231).

In April 1927, as war threatened in China, four offices and 98 enlisted men of the Guam squadron were sent to the naval station at Olongapo in the Philippine Islands (after a brief stay in Shanghai) to patrol the Chinese coast. Orote Airfield was reactivated in September 1928, when the small group of Marines, left behind to maintain the station and to provide weather data, were joined by the 85 men and four to six offices of Patrol Squadron 3-M. Three years later, in February 1931, the squadron was withdrawn and the station closed (Carano and Sanchez 1964: 232).

Guam was held by the Japanese from its surrender on December 10, 1941, until 1944. For more than three years, Orote Airfield was seldom used by the Japanese (Lotz 1975). In February 1944, the field was bombed by 12 American carrier-based planes, after which all Guamanian males between the ages of 12 and 60 were drafted into labor battalions and put to work fortifying the island against the expected American invasion. Among the tasks accomplished by the battalions was the repair and completion of the Orote airstrip. At this time, Orote was one of two operational airstrips on the island. The other was at Jalaguag, the location of the present Naval Air Station on Agana. A third airstrip, at Dededo, was under construction at the time of the invasion (Carano and Sanchez 1964: 290). During the battle of the Philippine Sea, Orote was used by Japanese carrier-based planes to rearm and refuel and, as of June 1944, 100 Zeros (fighters), 10 Gekkos (night fighters), and 60 Ginga (bombers) were based at the Orote and Jalaguag fields (Lotz 1975).

The recapture of Guam by the Americans began on July 21, 1944, with an amphibious landing of a force which included nearly 55,000 ground troops. Orote Peninsula was secured July 29, 1944 (Figure 1), and repair of the field was begun the same day by a 50-man working party (Lotz 1975).

It did not take long for the Marines to get Orote Airfield into operational condition. Only six hours after the first engineer units moved onto the strip, a Navy TBF was called in for a test run. With Lieutenant (jg) Edward F. Terrar, Jr. as the pilot, the plane came in, touched its wheels to check the ground, and took off again to circle the field for an actual landing. At 1650, it touched down, and Orote Airfield was ready for use (Lodge 1954: 95).

Following a few days' use by light planes, the 7th of August saw "the first Marine planes (VMF-225) based on Orote Airfield flying combat missions over Guam" (Lodge 1954: 190). By mid-November, Marine Air Group 21 (MAG-21), based at Orote, consisted of 12 fighter, bomber, observation and air warning squadrons that included 529 officers, 3,778 enlisted men, and 204 aircraft (Lotz 1975).

The runway, which had been built by the Japanese to a length of 4,500 feet, was entirely rebuilt and lengthened to 5,500 feet by the Marine engineers (Anon. 1947: 350).

Seabees assisted in the development of the field, constructing hardstands, shops and warehouses. Orote Field was in constant use after the early part of August 1944, first for fighter operations and later for conditioning 1,800 plans per month for the Fleet and the Marines. Planes were tested, repaired, and cleaned of the preserving compounds with which they had been shipped overseas. An aviation supply depot and an aircraft repair and overhaul unit were established at the field (Anon. 1947: 350).

In 1946, Orote Field was closed because adverse trade winds made it less desirable than other fields on Guam. At that time, it included two runways, which still exist (Figure 2). The original runway, oriented northwest-southeast, is crossed by another, 4,000 feet long and oriented northeast-southwest (Lotz 1975).

Following the fall of South Vietnam, Operation New Life (April-October 1975) included the establishment and operation of a large tent city on and around Orote Airfield for the accommodating and processing of tens of thousands of refugees (Anon. 1975). The construction of the tent city, which sheltered as many as 50,430 people at a time, included the clearing of hundreds of acres around the runways of vegetation and the grading of the thin soil down to bedrock. It is evident that the only substantial portions of the airfield remaining today are the runways and taxiways shown in Figure 2.

REFERENCES

Anonymous

- 1947 Building the Navy's Bases in World War II. U. S. Government
Printing Office, Washington, D. C.
- 1975 "Operation NEWLIFE After Action Report; Guam." Commander-in-Chief
Pacific Representative; Guam and the Trust Territories of the
Pacific.

Carano, Paul and Pedro C. Sanchez

- 1964 A Complete History of Guam. Charles E. Tuttle Company, Rutland,
Vermont.

Lodge, O. R.

- 1954 The Recapture of Guam. Historical Branch, G-3 Division,
Headquarters, U. S. Marine Corps. U. S. Government Printing
Office, Washington, D. C.

Lotz, David T.

- 1975 "Orote Field." National Register of Historic Places Inventory
Nomination Form.

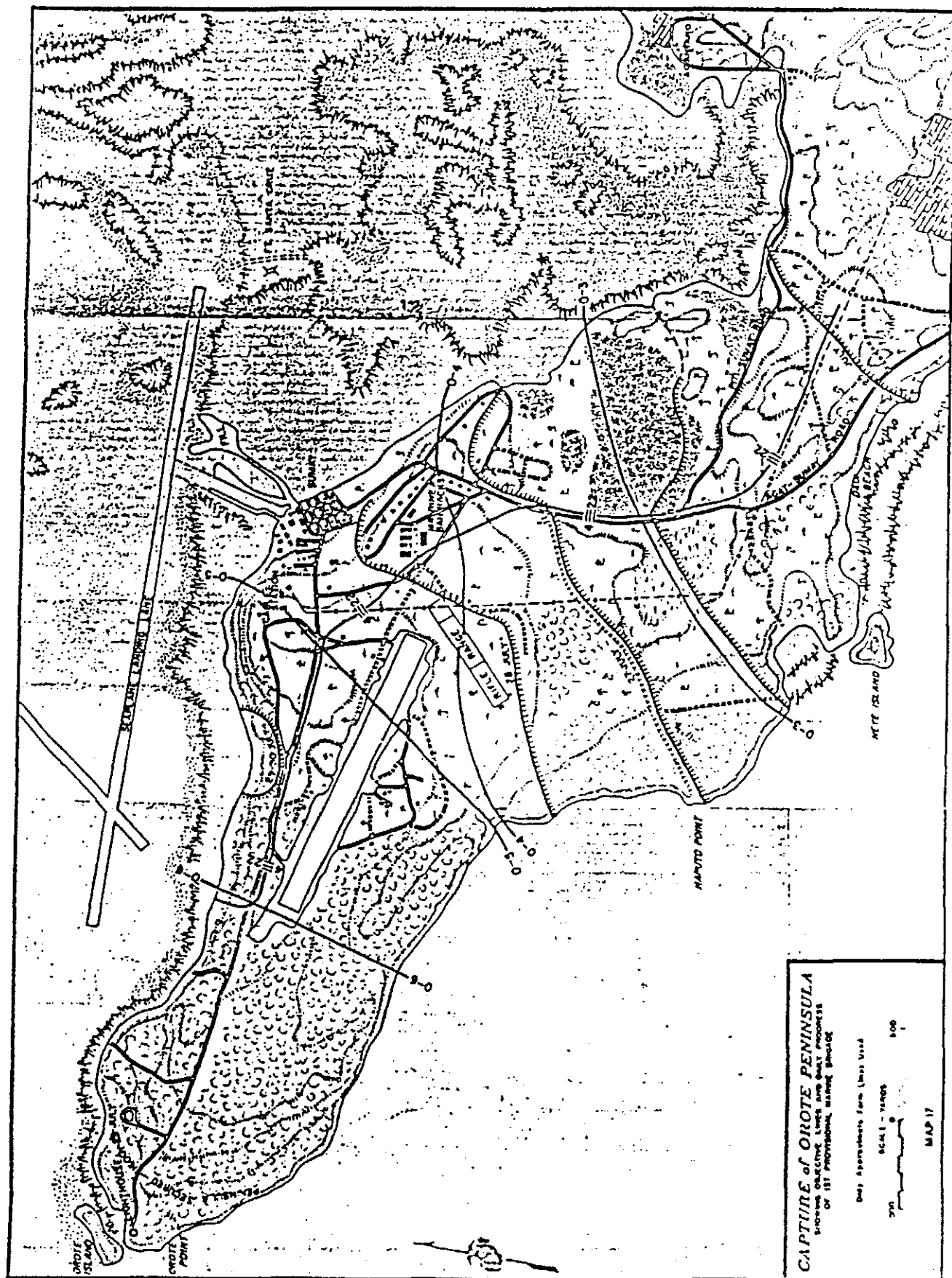
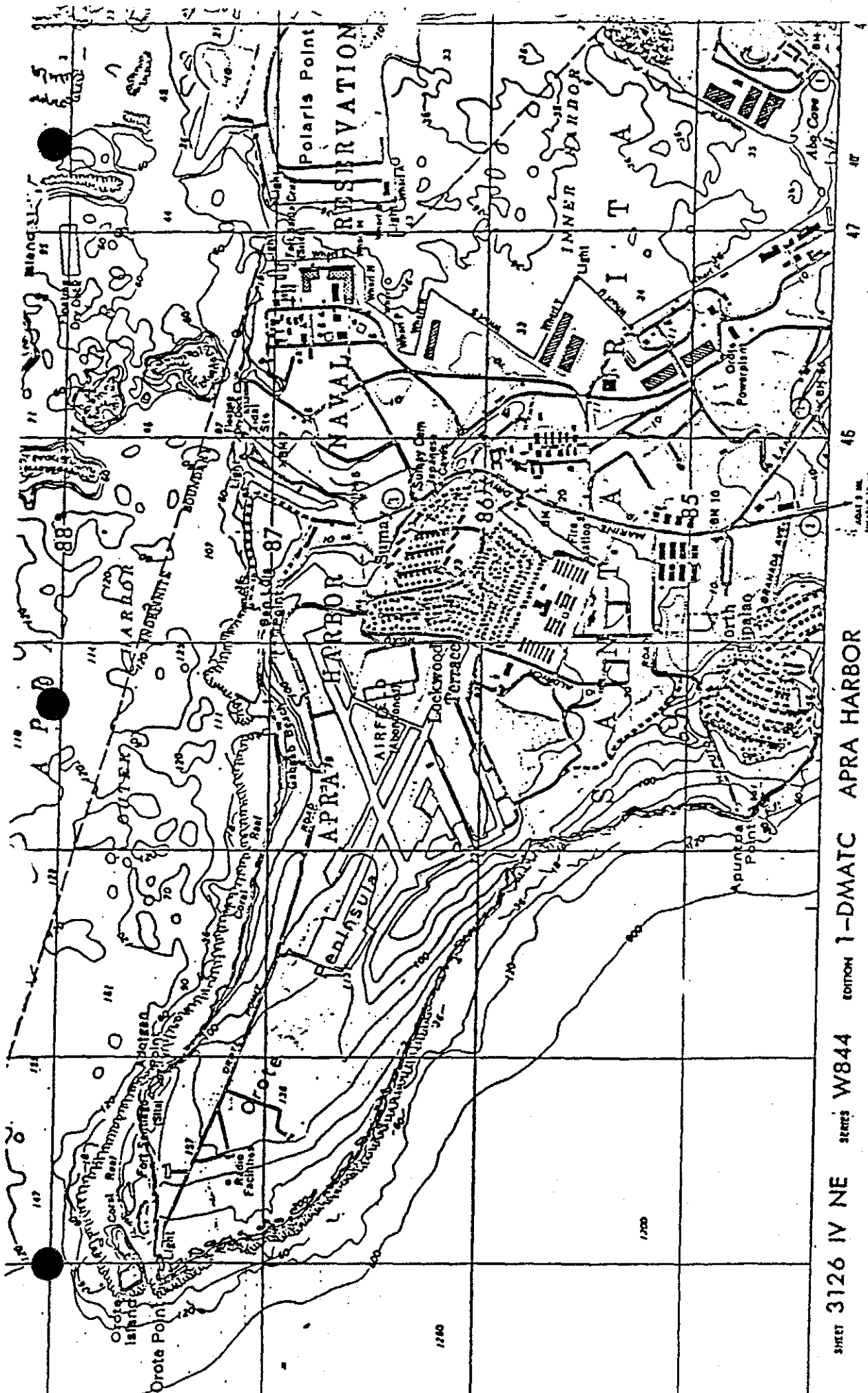


FIGURE 1. MAP OF OROTE POINT SHOWING OROTE AIR FIELD AT THE TIME OF THE RECAPTURE OF GUAM, JULY 1944. (Map 17, The Recapture of Guam by O.R. Dodge (1954))

REPRODUCED AT GOVERNMENT EXPENSE



AND COMPLETION
DATE (16 MAR)
FOR CANCELLATION

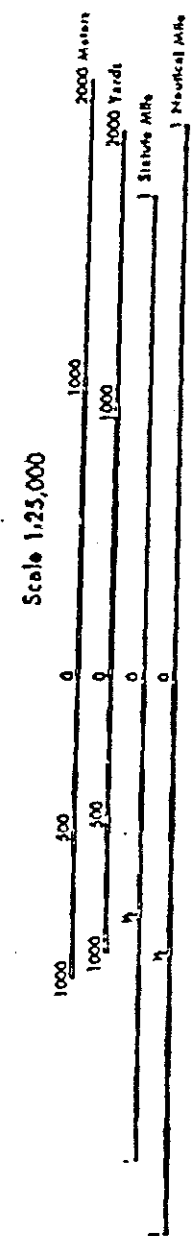


FIGURE 2. PORTION OF DEFENSE MAPPING AGENCY MAP (1968) SHOWING PRESENT FORM OF OROTE AIR FIELD.

REPRODUCED AT GOVERNMENT EXPENSE